NOT TO BE ISSUED
OUT OF THE LIBRARY.

891·551
OMa/Rub
52186

00052186

891.55 1
Oma / Rus
52186

THE
ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BOMBAY
Town Hall, Bombay.

Digitized with financial assistance from
Dr. Gersan Da Cunha
on 19 February, 2019

RUBÁIYÁT OF OMAR KHAYYÁM

Of this book
there is a very
limited edition
printed on
Japanese vellum
numbered and signed
by the Author.

RUBÁIYÁT OF OMAR KHAYYÁM

A Paraphrase from Several Literal Translations

By Richard Le Gallienne

London : Grant Richards
1897

52186
a c

891.551
Sina/Rub
52186

To JULIE NORREGARD

Fanø, Denmark,
August 24, 1897.

TO THE READER

I AM told that an apology will be expected of me for this humble attempt to add to the poetry of nations. For my part, I believe that poetry should be its own apology, and that in so far as the following paraphrase is poetry, it will need no further justification.

However, as there is another name upon the title-page besides my own, perhaps I owe it to my reverence for Omar Khayyám and Edward FitzGerald to make a few minor explanations.

To plead that the idea of a new verse renaering of Omar Khayyám was not my own unassisted impertinence, is but to hint at the originality of the publisher, without easing the burden of my responsibility.

As for that very minor matter, my Persian, I would put it to my friends of the Omar Khayyám Club—whether Persian be any 'necessary adjunct or true ornament' of your true Omarian. Indeed, I have a notion—which, of course, may be quite erroneous—that a knowledge of Persian disqualifies one for membership in that genial society. It would seem a sort of unkindness towards FitzGerald,—as suggesting, what it is the growing fashion to forget, that there ever was any such person as Omar at all.

However, there seems no real doubt that there was,

and that he has transmitted across some seven hundred years a series of cabalistical ink-stains,—like the markings on flowers,—which Messrs. Nicolas, Whinfield, and McCarthy agree in interpreting as nearly alike as is no matter. Of these rose-leaves 'freakt with jet,' these rubáiyát, these quatrains, Omar's editors count, roughly, some five hundred, many of which are of doubtful authenticity. These in the original manuscripts are subject to an arbitrary alphabetical arrangement which is no arrangement. They are a veritable pot-pourri of wine-stained petals—red, yellow, and white—

. . . maybe
The Saki gathered them that night he went
Across the grass and that sad moon arose.

Probably the original rose of Omar was, so to speak, never a rose at all, but only petals towards the making of a rose; and perhaps FitzGerald did not so much bring Omar's rose to bloom again, as make it bloom for the first time. The petals came from Persia, but it was an English magician who charmed them into a living rose.

Well, out of that hoard of wine-stained rose-leaves, FitzGerald made his wonderful Rose of the Hundred and One Petals—purple rose incomparable for glory and perfume. He had chosen many of the richest petals, but he had left many behind,—and it is chiefly of these that I have made my little yellow rose.

I have persisted in this image because it is really an accurate description of what I conceive to have been

FitzGerald's method of dealing with his original, as it describes my own method of manipulating the translations on which the following poem is based. In making my version I have, of course, employed the form of quatrain naturalised by FitzGerald—naturalised, it must be remembered, and not invented; the unrhymed third line being a feature of the original rubâ'iy, and the melody of the whole quatrain being accounted by those able to judge a beautiful echo of the old Persian music. There appears to be this difference, however, that the rhymes in the Persian are trisyllabic, a metrical effect not dignified in English. One slight variation of the accepted form I have occasionally attempted, following what appears to be a trick of emphasis not infrequently employed in the original—

the repetition of one emphatic word three times in lieu of rhymes, as in this quatrain:—

> *Would you seek beauty, seek it underground;*
> *Would you find strength—the strong are underground;*
> *And would you next year seek my love and me,*
> *Who knows but you must seek us—underground.*

To Mr. McCarthy's charming prose version I have to express my chief obligation. Those who know it will be able to discover for themselves to what extent I have literally followed, to what extent departed from, and to what extent expanded his prose. I confess to having made the freest use of my own fancy, and a number of the following quatrains have little or no verbal parallel in the original. Such, however, are never, in my judgment, foreign to Omar's manner of thought, but are

rather explicit expressions of philosophy implicit in his verses.

The quatrains in celebration of the clay provide a case in point. Omar never tires of pondering the riddle of the dust—

> *What buried moons of beauty Time hath hid*
> *Deep in earth's dusty bosom from of old;*

and my verses but more particularly formulate a mystic materialism which, obviously, is the very heart of his philosophy. À propos *of the clay, the reader will miss that little book of the pots which is one of the triumphs of FitzGerald's version. Omar gives several hints for that quaint little miracle-play, but the development of them is so much FitzGerald's own that there was no option but to leave the pots alone.*

The reader may remark that Omar's pessimism in the following paraphrase is mitigated more frequently by moods of optimism than in FitzGerald. In his attitude to the Deity, the 'he's a good fellow' note is more frequently sounded, a curiously complete and abandoned faith alternating paradoxically with the most savage criticism and despair. In this my paraphrase accords more nearly with the Omar of the more literal translators—for Omar is always ready to curse God with one cup and love Him with the next.

One interest of Omar's existence I may perhaps claim to represent with a more proportionate fulness,—his interest in love, and 'women with languorous narcissus eyes.' There are a considerably greater number of verses devoted to that pleasant subject in the original

than one would gather from FitzGerald; and though, after Oriental fashion, woman was mainly an interlude in Omar's life, a pet, a plaything, there are several quatrains which breathe quite a modern intensity of passion. That Omar sometimes made use of wine and women as symbols of his mystical philosophy is, doubtless, true; but that he more often made a simpler use of them is, happily, still more certain—for Omar was, emphatically, a poet who found his ideal in the real.

As it proved impracticable to give even such random continuity to these love-verses as I have attempted in the body of the poem, I have made use of them as an intermezzo, a device of arrangement which is appropriate as suggesting the intercalary importance of women in the life of the great thinker-drinker—as though, in

some pause of his grave or humourous argument, he should turn to caress the little moon at his side.

RICHARD LE GALLIENNE.

Waggoner's Wells, Hind Head, Surrey.

WAKE! for the sun, the shepherd of the sky,
Has penned the stars within their fold on high,
And, shaking darkness from his mighty limbs,
Scatters the daylight from his burning eye.

In Heaven's blue bowl the wine of morning brims,
A little cloud, a rose-leaf, in it swims,
The thirsty earth drinks morning from a bowl
Whose sides are space, and crusted stars its rims.

Yea! 'tis the morn! and like a morning star
The Sultán's palace glitters from afar,
No false mirage of morning, phantom-fair,
But blue-eyed day throned on his diamond car.

AWAKE! my soul, and haste betimes to drink,
This sun that rises all too soon shall sink,—
Come, come, O vintner, ope thy drowsy door!
We die of thirst upon the fountain's brink.*

Poor homeless men that have no other home,
Unto the wine-shop early are we come,
Since darkling dawn have we been waiting here,
Waiting and waiting for the day to come.

For some have love, some gold, and some have fame,
But we have nothing, least of all a name,
Nothing but wine, yet ah! how much to say,
Nothing but wine—yet happy all the same.

* *This line will be recognised as the famous refrain of a ballad by Charles d'Orleans, but Omar has in another connection this almost identical passage:—'I am racked with thirst, and yet a fresh cool stream flows before me.'*

YOUTH, like a magic bird, has flown away,
He sang a little morning hour in May,
Sang to the Rose, his love, that too is gone—
Whither is more than you or I can say.

O have you deemed, who looked on us with scorn,
Poor drunkards, dreaming-drunk from morn to morn,
Our raiment stained, our reputation gone,
That all our heart is grape or barley-corn?

Within the haunted wine-cup more than wine
It is that makes a mortal man divine,
We seek a drink more deadly and more strange
Than ever grew on any earthly vine.

THE wine-cup is the little silver well
Where Truth, if Truth there be, doth ever dwell;
Death too is there,—and Death who would not seek?—
And Love that in itself is Heaven and Hell.

The wine-cup is a wistful magic glass,
Wherein all day old faces smile and pass,
Dead lips press ours upon its scented brim,
Old voices whisper many a sweet 'alas!'

And sometimes in the nodding afternoon,
When all is listening-still and half-a-swoon,
Sudden one lifts a shining startled face,—
Hark! 'tis the magic bird, the magic tune!

DRUNKARDS! so be it—yet if all were wise,
All would be drunk like us, with dreaming eyes:
Poor sober world, so doleful all the day,
Leave mosque and mart, and join our Paradise.

There are no sorrows wine cannot allay,
There are no sins wine cannot wash away,
There are no riddles wine knows not to read,
There are no debts wine is too poor to pay.

WHO brought thee last night lovely to my side?
Who drew thy warm veil cunningly aside?
Who snatched thee back again so soon, so soon?
Who set this hell-fire burning in my side?

Like a dead man within thine arms I lay,
Entranced beyond the bounds of night and day—
O cruel breath of the dissevering dawn
That bids me fly who would for ever stay!

YEA, it is truly Khayyám that you see,
These are his dancing-girls, and drunk is he,
Throned in the tavern, fear below his feet,
As wisely happy as a man may be.

To win this wisdom he hath given up
All worldly goods, his very drinking-cup
Hath to the tavern-master humbly sold,—
Do thou the same, and join the wise who sup.

Only a breath divides belief from doubt,
'Tis muttered breath that makes a man devout,
Yea, death from life only a breath divides—
O haste to drink before that breath is out!

ONCE in the tavern you have reached the end,
No more to fear from enemy—or friend;
No more to hope, no more to do or say,
Nothing to pray for—nothing to pretend.

Art thou aweary, friend, in all thy bones?
Drink wine, red wine, and so forget thy groans;
Wine is unlawful, say'st thou? then say I—
Who loves not wine had best, I think, eat stones.

LIFE is so short, yet sleeps thy lovely head;
Why make so soon a death-bed of thy bed?
O love, awake! thy beauty wastes away—
Thou shalt sleep on and on when thou art dead.

THIS is no way my learnèd life to use!
Tell me a better, then, that I may choose.
Shall I for some remote imagined gain
My precious little hour of living lose?

Shall I, with such a little hoard to spend,
Waste it to such unprofitable end?
Do as you please who think another way—
For me the wine-cup and a pretty friend.

Lost to a world in which I crave no part,
I sit alone and listen to my heart,
Pleased with my little corner of the earth,
Glad that I came—not sorry to depart.

AND to my solitude sometimes I bring
A gracious shape to sit with me and sing,
Losing, to find, myself in her deep eyes—
Ah! then I ask no other earthly thing.

Good friends, beware! the only life we know
Flies from us like an arrow from the bow,
The caravan of life is moving by,
Quick! to your places in the passing show.

While still thy body's breath is warm and sweet,
Follow thy pleasures with determined feet,
Ere death, the coldest lover in the world,
Catches thee up with footsteps still more fleet.

SET not thy heart on any good or gain,
Life means but pleasure, or it means but pain;
When Time lets slip a little perfect hour,
O take it—for it will not come again.

Each day a leaf falls withered from the tree
Whose leaves make up the life of thee and me,
The leaves are counted, and the last is there—
Ready to fall before thy destiny.

I pray you, gentle Saki, of your grace,
Carry the wine-jar to some pleasant place,
Where, in a green and rose-hung sanctuary,
I'll gaze all day on my beloved's face.

O COME, my love, the spring is in the land!
Take wine and bread and book of verse in hand,
And sit with me and sing in the green shade,
Green little home amid the desert sand.

Yea! Spring is here, with all his ancient fires,
Quick with old dreams, and thrilled with new desires;
Vowed to repent, yet sure to sin again—
O leave repentance to your withered sires!

O listen, love, how all the builders sing!
O sap, O song, O green world blossoming!
White as the hand of Moses blooms the thorn,
Sweet as the breath of Jesus comes the spring.

SPRING, with the cuckoo-sob deep in his throat,
O'er all the land his thrilling whispers float,
Old earth believes his ancient lies once more,
And runs to meet him in a golden coat.

And many a lovely girl that long hath lain
Beneath the grass, out in the sun and rain,
Lifts up a daisied head to hear him sing,
Hearkens a little, smiles, and sleeps again.

Yea, love, this very ground you lightly tread,
Who knows! is pillow to some maiden's head;
Ah! tread upon it lightly, lest you wake
The sacred slumber of the happy dead.

STRANGE is the riddle of this life of ours !
Who knows the meaning of the heavenly powers?
Great Cæsar's wounds bleed yearly in the rose,
And flower-like ladies turn again to flowers.

The grave of beauty is its cradle too,
And new is old, and old is ever new,
Little grows great, and great grows small again,
And I to day—perchance to-morrow You !

What long-dead face makes here the grass so green?
On what earth-buried bosom do we lean?
Ah ! love, when we in turn are grass and flowers,
By what kind eyes to come shall we be seen?

LIKE us, will they have pity on the dead,
Blessing the green that hides love's sleeping head,
And, meanwhile, like such ancient folk as we,
Wine-drench the meadow to a tulip-bed?

O love, how green the world, how blue the sky!
And we are living—*living*—you and I!
Ah, when the sun shines and our love is near,
'Tis good to live, and very hard to die.

Beautiful wheel of blue above my head,
Will you be turning still when I am dead?
Were you still turning long before I came?—
O bitter thought to take with me to bed!

LIKE to the intertwisted melody
Of harp and lute shall our true wedding be,
And such a marriage of fair music make
That none shall separate the THEE *from* ME.

ONCE in a garden this advice I heard,
It was the Nightingale, the Rose's bird,—
He left the Rose, to hurry in my ear :
'It is our only chance, you take my word.'

Sweet cup of life no power shall fill again,
Thy juice goes singing through each gladdened vein—
Drink, drink, my love, two mouths upon the brim,
Ah ! drink, drink, drink, each little drop and drain.

For, have you thought how short a time is ours ?
Only a little longer than the flowers,
Here in the meadow just a summer's day,
Only to-day ; to-morrow—other flowers.

THE stream of life runs ah! so swiftly by,
A gleaming race 'twixt bank and bank—we fly,
Faces alight and little trailing songs,
Then plunge into the gulf, and so good-bye

The bird of life is singing on the bough
His two eternal notes of 'I and Thou'—
O! hearken well, for soon the song sings through
And, would we hear it, we must hear it now.

The bird of life is singing in the sun,
Short is his song, nor only just begun,—
A call, a trill, a rapture, then—so soon!—
A silence, and the song is done—is done.

NOR shall you 'scape, though Jamshyd be your name,
And like a pyramid your soaring fame,
Forgetful grass o'er all alike shall wave,
And moths eat up your memory just the same.

The dove shall coo upon your castle wall,
The timorous lizard o'er your head shall crawl—
Who lies so still within this ruined grave?
Why, this was Bahram, noisiest of them all!

Yea! what is man that deems himself divine?
Man is a flagon, and his soul the wine;
Man is a reed, his soul the sound therein;
Man is a lantern, and his soul the shine.

WOULD you be happy! hearken, then, the way:
Heed not To-morrow, heed not Yesterday;
The magic words of Life are Here and Now—
O fools, that after some to-morrow stray!

Were I a Sultán, say what greater bliss
Were mine to summon to my side than this,—
Dear gleaming face, far brighter than the moon!
O love! and this immortalising kiss.

Men talk of heaven,—there is no heaven but here;
Men talk of hell,—there is no hell but here;
Men of hereafters talk, and future lives,—
O love, there is no other life—but here.

GAY little moon, that hath not understood!
She claps her hands and calls the red wine good;
O careless and beloved, if she knew
This wine she fancies is my true heart's blood!

NOR idle I who speak it, nor profane,
This playful wisdom growing out of pain;
How many midnights whitened into morn
Before the seeker knew he sought in vain!

You want to know the Secret—so did I,
Low in the dust I sought it, and on high
Sought it in awful flight from star to star,
The Sultán's watchman of the starry sky.

Up, up, where Parwin's hoofs stamp heaven's floor,
My soul went knocking at each starry door,
Till on the stilly top of heaven's stair,
Clear-eyed I looked—and laughed—and climbed no more.

OF all my seeking this is all my gain:
No agony of any mortal brain
Shall wrest the secret of the life of man;
The Search has taught me that the Search is vain.

Yet sometimes on a sudden all seems clear—
Hush! hush! my soul, the Secret draweth near;
Make silence ready for the speech divine—
If Heaven should speak, and there be none to hear!

Yea! sometimes on the instant all seems plain,
The simple sun could tell us, or the rain;
The world, caught dreaming with a look of heaven,
Seems on a sudden tip-toe to explain.

LIKE to a maid who exquisitely turns
A promising face to him who, waiting, burns
In hell to hear her answer—so the world
Tricks all, and hints what no man ever learns.

Look not above, there is no answer there;
Pray not, for no one listens to your prayer;
NEAR is as near to God as any FAR,
And HERE is just the same deceit as THERE.

But here are wine and beautiful young girls,
Be wise and hide your sorrows in their curls;
Dive as you will in life's mysterious sea,
You shall not bring us any better pearls.

ALLAH, perchance, the secret word might spell;
If Allah be, He keeps His secret well;
What He hath hidden, who shall hope to find?
Shall God His secret to a maggot tell?

So since with all my passion and my skill,
The world's mysterious meaning mocks me still,
Shall I not piously believe that I
Am kept in darkness by the heavenly will?

THOUGH the green world were wrapped in flaming
bell,
Though sun and stars from out their stations fell,
Still, merciless Beloved, would I stand
Firm in your path and ask you, 'Is it well?'

THE Koran! well, come put me to the test—
Lovely old book in hideous error drest—
Believe me, I can quote the Koran too,
The unbeliever knows his Koran best.

And do you think that unto such as you,
A maggot-minded, starved, fanatic crew,
God gave the Secret, and denied it me?—
Well, well, what matters it! believe that too.

Old Khayyám, say you, is a debauchee;
If only you were half so good as he!
He sins no sins but gentle drunkenness,
Warm-hearted mirth, and kind adultery.

BUT yours the cold heart, and the murderous tongue,
The wintry soul that hates to hear a song,
The close-shut fist, the mean and measuring eye,
And all the little poisoned ways of wrong.

So I be written in the Book of Love,
I have no care about that book above;
Erase my name, or write it as you please—
So I be written in the Book of Love.

What care I, love, for what the Sufis say?
The Sufis are but drunk another way;
So you be drunk, it matters not the means,
So you be drunk—and glorify your clay.

DRUNKEN myself, and with a merry mind,
An old man passed me, all in vine-leaves twined ;
I said, 'Old man, hast thou forgotten God?'
'Go, drink yourself,' he said, 'for God is kind.'

'Did God set grapes a-growing, do you think,
And at the same time make it sin to drink?
Give thanks to Him who foreordained it thus—
Surely He loves to hear the glasses clink!'

From God's own hand this earthly vessel came,
He shaped it thus, be it for fame or shame ;
If it be fair—to God be all the praise,
If it be foul—to God alone the blame.

TO me there is much comfort in the thought
That all our agonies can alter nought,
Our lives are written to their latest word,
We but repeat a lesson He hath taught.

Our wildest wrong is part of His great Right,
Our weakness is the shadow of His Might,
Our sins are His, forgiven long ago,
To make His mercy more exceeding bright.

When first the stars were made and planets seven,
Already was it told of me in Heaven
That God had chosen me to sing His Vine,
And in my dust had thrown the vinous leaven.

IF 'tis a sin to drink the yellow wine,
The sin is surely His, not thine or mine;
Fated to drink, how dare I disobey—
And bring to nought the prophecy divine!

So in the tavern pass I all my days,
And sing and drink, and give to God the praise;
Ready, at any summons of His hand,
To do His bidding in still harder ways.

O MY beloved, may your glad to-morrows
Stretch out before you, endless as my sorrows;
Haste not away, I have but wine and you,
Yea! life is nought unless from you it borrows.

ETERNAL torment some sour wits foretell
For those who follow wine and love too well,—
Fear not, for God were left alone in Heaven
If all the lovely lovers burnt in hell.

He who believes in hell and knows Thy grace
Shall surely find in hell his resting-place,
Keep for the mosque these fables of Thy wrath—
No man believes them who hath seen Thy face.

I cannot think that the Beloved Friend
Who made the world so fair should choose to rend
This lovely curtain of the night and day,
Nor break—unless some day He means to mend.

YEA! I believe that He who made the skies
Is wonderfully good, and very wise,—
Beloved Master! Hast thou never seen
The tears of pity gather in His eyes?

I am not lawless, though I break Thy law,
Drunken am I with very love and awe;
'Twas ever thus with veritable seers—
Too drunk with joy to tell us what they saw.

In my left hand I hold the Koran tight,
And grasp the wine-cup firmly in my right—
Thus do I stand beneath the eye of heaven,
Not quite a saint, nor yet a sinner quite.

I BREAK one law, another law to keep;
The laws of death and hate I scorn to keep,
The law of Love that is the law of Life—
That is the only law I dare to keep.

Sanction, O God, some little pleasant thing,
Nor set our every joy with snare and sting;
I would not break Thy law,—yet must I still
Unto my innocent transgressions cling.

Lo! Nature's law and God's—two angry fires—
Each the allegiance of my soul requires;
Strange God that made, unmake me what I am—
Or reconcile the law to my desires!

WHO set this wine-cup in my willing way?
Who made this woman of enchanted clay?
When gods decree such difficult commands,
They should give too the power to obey.

'Tis but a fiat of impossible good,
A dream of high fantastic rectitude;
'Tis not for man, that lordly animal,
While of its ancient colour runs his blood.

If I were God, and this poor world were mine,
O thou shouldst see on what a fair design
I would rebuild it like a dream for thee,—
Nor shouldst thou ever blush to call it thine.

IF I were God, the very stars and flowers
Should be more fair, and all the sterns and sours
Change to a music sweet as rivers flowing—
If I were God, and this poor world were ours.

If I were God, I would not wait the years
To solve the mystery of human tears;
And, unambiguous, I would speak my will,
Nor hint it darkly to the dreaming seers.

If *I* were God! this I!—a poor old man
Whose heaven is wine, whose hell is Ramadan;
Poor dizzy head within a reeling world,
Poor trembling hand—the steadfast heavens to span!

WHAT though thy body like a moon be fair,
Tulips thy cheeks, and like a bower thy hair,—
Strange that the builder of the heavens should deign
To paint thy little phantom on the air!

'TIS a strange world we came to, You and I,
Whence no man knows, and surely none knows why,
Why we remain—a harder question still,
And still another—whither when we die?

Into this life of cruel wonder sent,
Without a word to tell us what it meant,
Sent back again without a reason why—
Birth, life, and death—'twas all astonishment.

Some say we came God's purpose to fulfil—
'Faith a poor purpose then, if so you will;
Sport for the heavenly huntsmen, others say,—
Sorry the sport, methinks, and poor the skill.

WHAT purpose think you has the Saki there,
Pouring those shining motes of wine and air?
A bubble's *life*—can it be nought to him?
A million bubbles—he must surely care!

Passionate particles of dust and sun,
Run your brief race, nor ask why it is run—
We are but shadow-pictures, voices, dreams;
Perchance they make and break us—just for fun.

BE not too proud, my little haughty moon,
Nor to my love deny so small a boon;
My heart is heavy, love can make it light—
Fair as a flower—and faded just as soon!

Vain little breath of sweet rose-coloured dust,
For such as thou Death hath a fearful lust,—
See, where he tears the rose's veil aside,
Kisses and shatters her, with one wild gust.

'TIS a great fuss, all this of THEE and ME,
Important folk are we—to THEE and ME;
Yet what if we mean nothing after all,
And what if Heaven cares nought for—THEE and ME?

All those who in their graves unheeded lie
Were just as pompous once as You and I,
Complacent spake their little arrogant names,
And wagged their heads, and never thought to die.

A beauty sleeps beneath yon quiet grass
Who dreamed her face the world might not surpass,
Strength is her neighbour, but he boasts no more,—
And over them the wind cries out, 'Alas!'

WOULD you seek beauty, seek it underground;
Would you find strength—the strong are underground;
And would you next year seek my love and me,
Who knows but you must seek us—underground.

O HEART, my heart, the world is weary-wise,
My only resting-place is your deep eyes,
O wrap me warm in their illusive love,—
For well I know that they are also lies.

SOMETIMES as, cup in hand among the flowers,
I think on all my witty wasted hours,
I see that wine has been a fable too,
Yes! even wine—so false a world is ours.

Yet were it vain some other way to try,
Of all our lying wine is least a lie,
All earthly roads wind nowhere in the end,—
What matters then the road we travel by?

Traveller in many lands—that too is nought!
And thou art rich and wise—alas! 'tis nought!
But, poor and foolish, *thou* hast stayed at home,—
Believe me, friend, that that is also nought!

O WEARY man upon a weary earth,
What is this toil that we call living worth?
This dreary agitation of the dust,
And all this strange mistake of mortal birth?

Would we were sure of some oasis blest,
Where, the long journey over, we might rest;
O just to sleep a hundred thousand years,
Tired head, tired heart, within the earth's dark breast!

At the pale gate of birth an angel stands
Singing a lying song of lovely lands,
Sweet as a bird each worn and weary lie,—
The soul believes and takes the angel's hands.

WOULD that some voice that knew the whole deceit,
Far off in space, the unborn soul might greet,
Hot-foot for earth, with lying fancies fired,
And thunder all the terror and the cheat.

Let us make haste, perchance for us to warn
The eager soul that clamours to be born,
To turn aside all that tremendous doom
Of fated generations still unborn.

SOMETIMES it is my fancy to suppose
The rose thy face—so like thy face it glows;
O woman made of roses out and in,
Sometimes I only take thee for a rose.

WRITE it in wine upon a rose-leaved scroll:
All wisdom I found hidden in the bowl,
All answers to all questions saving one,—
Which is the body, and which is the soul?

Poised for an instant in THE MASTER'S hand,
Body and soul like to a compass stand,
The body turning round the central soul,
HE makes a little circle in the sand.

This sounding world is but a dream that cries
In fancy's ears and lives in fancy's eyes,
Death lays his finger on the darkening soul,
And all the glowing shadow fades and flies.

SHALL death, that shuts the ears and locks the brain,
Teach us what eager life hath sought in vain?
Yet have I heard, so wild is human guess!
This dullard death shall make life's meaning plain.

When this mysterious self shall leave behind
The subtle painted clay that keeps it blind,
The ransomed essence wantons in the beam
That seeks in vain the dark embodied mind.

Yet if the soul should with the body die,
A flame that flickers when the oil runs dry,
Still but the heart that drives the strange machine—
And what remains of this you once called 'I'?

52186

THE soul is but the senses catching fire,
Marvellous music of the body's lyre,—
The angel senses are the silver strings
Stirred by the breath of some unknown desire.

WHITE as the moon and as the cypress slim,
O how my jealous heart doth envy him
Who calls thee his to love by sun and star,
Rules o'er thine heart, and owns each little limb.

MYSTERIOUS mother substance, who are they
That flout the earth that made them? Who
are they
That waste their wonder on the fabulous soul?
I can but choose to marvel at the clay.

This clay, this dream-sown sod, this chemic earth,
This wizard dust, wherein all shapes of birth,—
Soft flowers, great beasts, and huge pathetic
kings,—
Small seeds of wonder, fill a needle's girth.

This clay, this haunted house of sight and sound,
Strange sunny rooms that airily resound
With phantom music played for phantom feet,—
And hark! a rat is gnawing underground.

THIS clay, so strong of heart, of sense so fine,
Surely such clay is more than half divine—
'Tis only fools speak evil of the clay,
The very stars are made of clay like mine.

Yet mark yon potter! see the rascal twirl
On one base wheel the dust of prince and churl;
Plebeian potter, 'tis a king's right hand!
And this was once a violet-breathing girl.

'Tis the fair stuff of which the flowers are made,
'Tis beauty's very substance sore decayed,
The brows of ivory, the breasts of myrrh,—
And lo! this fellow turns it to a trade.

THUS spake I to a potter on a day,
Bidding his careless wheel a moment stay—
'Be pitiful, O potter, nor forget
Potters and pots alike are made of clay.'

And as I spake I heard a whisper steal,
A sad low laughter, from the potter's wheel—
Behold! it was my father's sacred dust
For which unwittingly I made appeal.

Almighty Potter, on whose wheel of blue
The world is fashioned, and is broken too,
Why to the race of men is heaven so dire?
In what, O wheel, have I offended you?

FAIR wheel of heaven silvered with many a star,
Whose sickly arrows strike us from afar,
Never a purpose to my soul was dear
But heaven crashed down my little dream to mar.

Never a bird within my sad heart sings
But heaven a flaming stone of thunder flings—
O valiant wheel! O most courageous heaven!—
And leaves me lonely with the broken wings.

Great wheel that pauses not for all our cries,
How fair to look on are your morning skies!
'Tis but at night I fear your placid blue,—
So very evil are your silver eyes.

MINE is a passion that can never change,
It is so sorrowful and sweet and strange
That even from the very nightingale
I must conceal it—'tis so very strange.

For lo! I love a woman this strange way:
To be as dead without her, yet to stay,
A stubborn exile from felicity,
Far from her side until the Judgment Day.

YET, 'tis but children curse that wheel above,
Which just as helpless as a man doth move,—
Yea! hath less mind and motion of its own—
About the business of the heavenly love.

Nor are those sightless stars a whit more wise,
Impotent silver dots upon the dice
The lords of heaven each night and morning throw,
In some tremendous hazard of the skies.

Nay! think no more, but grip the slender waist
Of her whose kisses leave no bitter taste,
Reason 's a hag and love a painted jade,—
Come, daughter of the vine, dear and disgraced.

'TIS a wild wife, but sweet, my saintly brother,
Nor in this sour world know I such another;
'Sweet but forbidden!—yet who would not prefer
The wanton daughter to the lawful mother!

Sweet but forbidden—forbidden because 'tis sweet!
For salt and sour is mortal's proper meat,
Let but a grain of honey fall therein,
And straight the surly leech forbids us eat.

Strange in this wicked world how hard to find
A fellow-soul to honest sin inclined,
Sinners at home are always saints abroad,
The rose must never dare to speak its mind!

IF only one dare tell the lovely things
The nightingale unto the red rose sings!
'See! I am Yusuf's flower,' the red rose cries,
And wide and warm her sanguine bodice flings.

O ignorant world that brutishly denies
Free speech unto the exquisitely wise;
A thousand pearls—yet only one is threaded!
Alas! for noble truth that hourly dies.

Strange in a world so wonderfully planned
The thick-wit fool should always rule the land,—
Ah, well! the cup must solve that riddle too,
'Tis more than we shall ever understand.

BUT shall the jocund wise be sent to school
For ever to the narrow-minded fool,
The evil-smelling saint outlaw the rose,
The joyless make for joy a joyless rule?

Why should it be that those who merit least
Must always be the masters of the feast,
The fool's purse fat, the wise man's ever lean,
And Beauty's self the harlot of the Beast?

'Tis written clear within the Book of Fate—
The little always shall oppress the great,
Who most deserve be slave to those who least,
And only fools and rascals go in state.

O LOVE, why say so oft—'the world! the world!'
Have we not put it by—the world! the world!
That cruel thief of all our dearest joys,
Hath it not all but murdered us—the world!

AT what strange prices are we bought and sold,
All is not golden that is bought with gold,
The foolish costliness of worthless things—
O for the scorn to tell it, stern and bold!

Yet is it well the vain world never knows
True riches from their counterfeited shows,
For what would happen if the vine were dear,
And men must sell a world to buy a rose!

Allah is good! he blinds the rich man's eyes
That he the weary and the worthless buys,
Gaining great store of all uncomely things,
And leaves the lovely for the poor and wise.

I WOULD not change the song the flute-girl sings
For all the diadems of weary kings;
His joys the Sultán shares with all the world,
His cares he keeps—a chain of glittering rings.

Have I not wine, and love to drink with me,
A garden and a gracious company
Of sweet-faced dancers, and the rising moon?—
This is the happy half of sovereignty.

If in this shadowland of life thou hast
Found one true heart to love thee, hold it fast;
Love it again, give all to keep it thine,
For love like nothing in the world can last.

LONG have I sought, but seldom found a lover;
To love aright is to be nought but lover;
He who would love, yet eat and rest him too,
Is still an animal, and not a lover.

For love is a great sleepless, foodless fire,
Love never moves his eyes from his desire;
Were love to sleep,—awaking, love were gone;
And what gross sustenance should love require?

MOON of my night, and art thou really here!
My happy eyes dare not believe thee here!
O love, love, love—come let us drink for joy—
Until again I doubt that thou art here!

NAY, ask me not about the FOUR-AND-FIVE,
Is it not strange enough to be alive?
I am so busy with that daring thought—
How should I care about the FOUR-AND-FIVE?

Expect not simple Khayyám to make plain
The riddles of your little prying brain;
Who stops to marvel at the simplest flower
Wonders with nought but wonder may explain.

Who knows the meaning of a grain of sand
Knows the whole meaning of the sea and land,
And simple One by thousands multiplied
Is no more difficult to understand.

HOW strange is man, that hath forgot so soon
The daily wonder of the sun and moon,
And his deep heart on childish riddles breaks,
And fancies idle as a summer noon!

And what should pious Khayyám have to do
With all your screaming sects seventy and two?
Sin, Faith and Islam—these are only words,
And my desire, Beloved Friend, is You.

You to the mosque, with howling hymn and prayer
I to the temple of the vine, repair,
The one true God in divers ways to seek;
I find Him here—but do you find Him there?

ALLAH, that numbers all my whitening hairs,
Knows, without telling, all my little cares;
Grateful is Allah, He will not forget
I have not wearied Him with endless prayers.

If the abodes of bliss be seven or eight,
What shall it profit my forlorn estate?
Reach me but wine to numb me where I lie
Heart-broken, stretched upon the wheel of Fate.

Khayyám, who long at learning's tents hath sewn,
Bids thee leave How and WHY and WHENCE alone;
Iram's soft lute, with sorrow in its strings,
Will tell thee all that ever can be known.

OF all the wise wisest is he who knows
What saith the wine as in the cup it flows,
And he alone is learnèd who can read
The little scented pages of the rose.

This little rose, frail shape of summer's breath,
How often hath she journeyed down to death!
The mighty tarried, but this rose returned—
Think then how strange must be the words she saith.

Sweet rose that in the darksome earth hath been,
O tell me—have you there my true love seen?
That was herself so fair a rose, until
Death touched her brow and changed her to a queen.

FORGETFUL unforgotten, I have found
No face again like thine, nor thy profound
Sad eyes again, nor heard in all the world
As thy blest voice again so sweet a sound.

O SUFI, dervish, subtle kalendar,
How very thirsty all your questions are!
I cannot answer them unless I lean
Upon the perfumed lip of yonder jar.

So great a brightness is the soul of wine
That even in the darkness it will shine,
And cocks will crow, mistaking for the dawn
The apparition of its light divine.

Well might a world without it so forlorn
Mistake the glorious wine-cup for the morn,
'Tis the true morning, there is none beside—
Wine was the happy morning I was born.

IF I the faithful vine should e'er forsake,
I think the nightingale's sad heart would break,
The rose throw down her petals in despair—
It were so strange a sacrifice to make.

When, with wild joys and sorrows broken quite,
I face the morning of the endless night,
Still shall I call for wine, and still for thee,
And Pleasure close the eyes she once kept bright.

Not all the fancies of the devotee
Shall make fair pleasure aught but fair for me:
These things are good—this woman and this wine,
Shall I exchange them for—hypocrisy?

WRONG not thyself, believing God to please,
Nor think to serve Him by such lies as these
Break not for fashion an eternal law,
Nor change true pleasures for false pieties.

Sunday is good for drinking, Monday too,
Nor yet on Tuesday put the wine from you,
Wednesday drink deep, Thursday nor Friday fail—
On Saturday is nothing else to do.

The sixtieth cup makes me so wise with wine,
A thousand riddles clear as crystal shine,
And much I wonder what it can have been
That used to puzzle this poor head of mine.

YET with the morn, the wine-deserted brain
Sees all its riddles trooping back again;
Say, am I sober when I see nought clear?
And am I drunk when I see all things plain?

When I am drunk the sky of life is clear,
And I gaze into it without a fear;
As I grow sober horribly I dread
The shadows of my vultures drawing near.

And as I drink, up through my brain there grows
The thornless image of a magic rose,
Whereto comes singing sweet a nightingale—
The wine-rose fades, and the brown wine-bird goes.

BUT O may never dawn that last sad hour
When wine shall fail of its accustomed power,
And I shall look with dull forgetful eyes,
An old dead man, on maidens in their flower.

Then were it time indeed to say good-bye
To the green earth and the old happy sky;
Bury me quick, a garrulous old corpse,—
There is no more of Khayyám left to die.

WHERE are the fair old faces gone a-biding?
Where is the far-off place of their abiding?'
I asked the wise and thus the wise to me:
Drink, they are gone—and there is never a tiding.'

COMES Ramadan, the pleasant days are done,
And pious breath obscures the very sun;
Soon must the wine mope lonely in the jar,
And lovely women weary to be won.

This shall I do, and so preserve the fast:
To-night I drink so deep that I shall last,
Sunk in the strong oblivion of wine,
Till the whole forty evil days be passed.

Yet think not wine is wisdom for the fool,
'Tis but the wise should follow wisdom's rule;
The sot, the brawler, and the ugly-tongued,—
Believe not these of gentle Khayyám's school.

THIS tavern-wisdom was not made for all,
The congregation of the great is small,
Drink not with every wine-flown Hatim Tai,
Nor lift thy cup to every noisy call.

The Book of Joy is such a book as mine,
A book of rose-leaves smelling all of wine,
Beware the honey of its simple page—
It hath o'ertaken stronger heads than thine.

True wine has many meanings more than wine,
True wine will even warn us against wine—
Any intoxication of the soul,
Yea! or the senses, is the angel Wine.

IF only this green world might last for ever,
And love be love, and wine be wine for ever!
Eternal Rose of the Eternal Spring,
Would that mine eyes might burn on thee for ever.

In all those star-cold heavens shall we find
Another home, so safe, so green and kind?
O gentle earth, methinks my heart will break
At the mere thought of leaving you behind.

If only somewhere at the journey's end
Friend might again behold the face of friend!
Very forgetful of us grow the dead,
That never yet a word or whisper send.

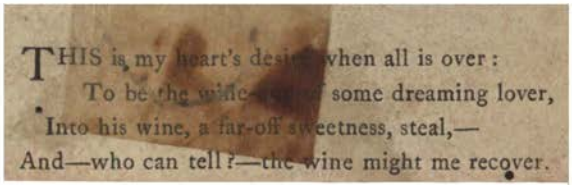
NIGHT with a sudden splendour opens wide
Her purple robe, and bares her silver side,
The moon, her bosom, fills the world with light,—
Only thy breast is lovelier, my bride.

With twilight dew each rose's face is wet,
Morning was grey upon them when we met,
Still must I drink, and still must drink with thee—
'Tis many laughing hours to bed-time yet.

O LOVE, before Death comes to make our bed,
Drink wine, red wine, red as the rose is red,
Our bodies are not gold that we should hope
For men to dig us up when we are dead.

Ah, when at last the shrouded Saki, Death,
Brings me a cup so sweet it takes my breath,
Shall I not bid him welcome like his brother?
Life I have feared not, shall I then fear death?

Nor yet shall fail the efficacious Vine:
Wash me as white as silver in old wine,
And for my coffin fragrant timbers take
Of tendrilled wood—(then plant a rose, and dine!)


THIS is my heart's desire when all is over:
To be the wine of some dreaming lover,
Into his wine, a far-off sweetness, steal,—
And—who can tell?—the wine might me recover.

O Saki, when at last is run my race,
Will you remember my accustomed place,
  When through the garden all the summer night
The moon goes seeking my forgotten face?

This is the thought the dead man thinks upon:
Warm in the sun the old kind world spins on,
  Trellised with vines and roses as of old,
And no one says—'Where is old Khayyám gone?'

O FRIENDS forget not, as you laugh and play,
Some that were laughing with you yesterday,
Spare from your rose some petals for their graves,
Sprinkle some wine upon their parching clay.

For even this dust that blows along the street
Once whispered to its love that life was sweet,
Ruddy with wine it was, with roses crowned,
And now you spurn it with your eager feet.

There is no better piety than this:
To set aside a little of your bliss,
To feign for death a living portion still
In all the little joys that death must miss.

HOW wonderfully is the day gone by!
If only when the stars come we could die,
And morning find us gathered to our dreams,—
Two happy solemn faces and the sky!

Mr. Grant Richards's New Books

POEMS BY A. AND L. By ARABELLA and LOUISA SHORE, Authors of 'War Lyrics,' 'Hannibal,' 'Elegies and Memorials,' etc. Crown 8vo. 5s. net.

REALMS OF UNKNOWN KINGS: Poems. By LAURENCE ALMA TADEMA. Fcap. 8vo. Paper cover, 2s. net; buckram, 3s. net.

THE LAUGHTER OF JOVE: a Novel. By HELMUTH SCHWARTZE. Crown 8vo. Cloth. 6s.

THE NEW ANTHOLOGIES

THE FLOWER OF THE MIND: a Choice among the Best Poems. Made by ALICE MEYNELL. With Cover Design by LAURENCE HOUSMAN. Crown 8vo. Buckram. 6s.

A BOOK OF VERSES FOR CHILDREN. Compiled by EDWARD VERRALL LUCAS. With Cover, End-Paper, and Title-page designed in colours by F. D. BEDFORD. Crown 8vo. Cloth. 6s.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE IDEA OF GOD: an Inquiry into the Origins of Religions. By GRANT ALLEN. Demy 8vo. Cloth. 20s. net.

THE INFERNO OF DANTE TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH VERSE. By EUGENE LEE-HAMILTON, Author of 'Sonnets of the Wingless Hours,' etc. Fcap. 8vo. Buckram. 5s. net.

A PEAKLAND FAGGOT: Tales told of Milton Folk. By R. MURRAY GILCHRIST, Author of 'The Stone Dragon,' etc. Fcap. 8vo. Cloth. 2s. 6d. The First Volume of the Sylvan Series.

---

9 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, W.C.

00052186

Digitized with financial assistance from
Dr. Gersan Da Cunha
on 19 February, 2019